U.S. Support for Afghan Women, Children, and Refugees

A Report Submitted to the Congress
By the Department of State
Under the Afghan Women and Children Relief Act of 2001
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Introduction: The Role of Women's Issues in Afghan Reconstruction

Basic Principles of U.S. Policy

The worldwide advancement of women's issues is not only in keeping with deeply held values of the American people; it is, as Secretary Powell has emphasized, strongly in the U.S. national interest as well. Peace, prosperity, and stable governance cannot exist in the long term in societies where women are denied basic human rights and dignities. Promoting women's rights will improve not only the lives of women, but also their families, communities, and societies across the globe. At the same time, respect for women advances broader U.S. foreign policy goals, such as encouraging broad-based representative governance and increasing worldwide economic prosperity. Indeed, President Bush has stated that fostering respect for women is an imperative of U.S. foreign policy, among the goals that are "grounded in the non-negotiable demands of human dignity and reflect universal human values."

Notwithstanding these absolutes, in Afghanistan, as elsewhere around the world, the United States will not seek to impose its culture on other societies. Our approach is to engage with other governments and civic leaders, consult with local and regional experts, and devise individual strategies that best address a country's specific needs and goals. That, we believe, is the best way to exercise effective American leadership on international women's issues. The reconstruction of Afghanistan is an Afghan-led effort because international assistance efforts can only work if they are acceptable to the Afghan people. Local involvement in identifying local needs is essential to any lasting improvements. In this respect, U.S. policy is consistent with the judgment recorded in March 2002 by a group of prominent nongovernmental organizations (NGOs,) based on their own fact-finding mission to Kabul: "[T]hose who bore the brunt of the conflict and Taliban repression are dedicated to ensuring that the reconstruction process is led by Afghans and that it reflects the needs and priorities of Afghans." [*Filling the Vacuum: Prerequisites to Security in Afghanistan,* Report of the Consortium for Response to the Afghanistan Transition, March 2002, p. 42]

The United States opposed the Taliban's treatment of women for years. The war on terrorism and the overthrow of Al-Qaida and Taliban forces in Afghanistan have given the women of that country a unique and unanticipated opportunity to reclaim their futures. The Bonn Agreement signed by Afghan representatives in

December 2001 underscores the centrality of democratic principles and human rights in its provisional arrangements, including the protection of the rights of women. U.S. officials now work closely with the whole panoply of their counterparts, both in Afghanistan and in the international agencies and donor communities, to ensure that the needs of Afghan women and their children receive high-level and high-priority attention.

Broader Afghan Context

At the same time, the United States recognizes that, above and beyond any political agreements, it is the everyday practical situation on the ground that will most determine the fate of Afghanistan's women, children, and refugees. Afghan women have suffered greatly from the endemic warfare and general deterioration of life in their country—and they will benefit greatly from its overall recovery. In part this will require programs geared specifically to the needs of women, children, and refugees; in part it will come from countrywide programs that benefit the entire population. That is why it is practically impossible to identify artificially "pure" dollar figures for U.S. support destined exclusively for the women or children of Afghanistan, even as the U.S. engages in a massive effort to improve their lives.

In this connection, Secretary Powell's remarks about overall U.S. policy toward women are particularly applicable to the situation in Afghanistan:

> Women are the most vulnerable group when conflict erupts and social structures break down…. In societies torn by violence, maternal and infant mortality rates skyrocket. When the men and boys go off to fight, the women struggle to care for family members left behind, and to find ways to provide for their basic necessities.... For all these reasons, much of our crisis response activity is geared to meeting the needs of female victims of conflict, and we make a point of involving the women who are on the receiving end of our assistance in the shaping and carrying out of our relief programs. These include special food programs, psychosocial trauma counseling, mother-child care, and women's and girls' education.

A different, and equally important, Afghanistan-specific aspect of the global campaign for women's rights is the cultural context in which this campaign must operate. We are keenly aware of the traditional constraints on women as practiced in much of Afghan society, as well as of the many internal and external efforts over the years to change that situation. In particular, we pay close attention today to a range of experts, activists, and other members of Afghanistan's diverse community of women. On one frequently posed question—the burqa—a number of these women, from varied backgrounds, have advised against a simple equation of progress with removing that traditionally modest Afghan female attire. Rather, they say, one should focus much more on the major practical issues of education, health care, and employment. The

implication for U.S. policy in Afghanistan is that alertness to such authentic local judgments about priorities and cultural sensitivities should be part of our engagement on women's issues—at least as much as in our engagement with the process of democracy-building or of economic development.

In sum, the U.S. focus on Afghan women and children is an integral part of our overall approach to rebuilding their whole country. This approach is one that President Bush has compared, in its goal of promoting the long-term promise of stability, prosperity and freedom, to the post-World War II Marshall Plan in Europe. That combination of generous vision and sustained hard work, the President noted, crowned a military victory with "a moral victory that resulted in better lives for individual human beings." Today, despite obvious historical and cultural differences, Afghanistan is a prime case in point for such a broad-based, long-term approach.

Scope of This Report

These introductory thoughts should be considered alongside a number of acknowledgements that must be made at the outset about the nature of this report. First, this report is offered pursuant to S.1573, The Afghan Women and Children Relief Act of 2001. The Act, in Section 3, authorizes "educational and health care assistance for the women and children in Afghanistan and as refugees in neighboring countries," to be "provided in a manner that protects and promotes the human rights of all people in Afghanistan, utilizing indigenous institutions and nongovernmental organizations, especially women's organizations, to the extent possible." That Section further requires a Report to Congress from the Secretary of State, "beginning 6 months after the date of enactment of this Act [November 15, 2001] … describing the activities carried out under this Act and otherwise describing the condition and status of women and children in Afghanistan and the persons in refugee camps…."

This six-month report is thus the first of its kind, and therefore necessarily preliminary. In that sense it is a bit like a snapshot of a moving target. Both the reporting and the reality of our efforts on behalf of Afghan women, children, and refugees need to be viewed as a work in progress, one whose true measurement will most accurately be assessed by historians. The report will refer specifically to certain significant areas that by nature will need to be considered in greater detail at a future occasion. In addition, it should be noted that there remains considerable regional and urban/rural variation in the condition of women and children in Afghanistan—but only anecdotal or impressionistic information, as opposed to systematic data, about such differences. In general, some of the most dramatic improvements so far in education, health, and other indicators have come in the cities, particularly in the capital of Kabul, where the logistics of international assistance pose less formidable problems.

That sweeping generalization, however, hardly does justice to the country's complex reality. In some remote areas, for example, such as Badakhshan, there have been relatively rapid gains in schooling and health care for girls. Conversely, in some major cities, even where the security situation is comparatively quiet, as in Herat, attempts to advance women's social status continue to confront grave obstacles from entrenched local traditions or political resistance. The discussion below makes reference to these fragmentary accounts as appropriate, but the picture is unavoidably and admittedly sketchy at this stage. A more considered discussion of these important local dimensions of the subject is projected for subsequent reporting, as the required raw data become available.

Second, this report is not intended to represent an exhaustive description of all activities related to its subject matter. This is so in two different respects. For U.S. government activities in Afghanistan, the report strives to provide an accurate and authoritative picture of the overall direction of U.S. policy, with specific segments and features, as well as numerous illustrative examples. It does not include a detailed account of every separate project in any given area. In some of these areas (e.g., rehabilitation of Afghanistan's infrastructure), there exists a wide array of individual programs funded and managed by different Departments or Bureaus, primarily inside the Department of State and USAID, but also including components of the Departments of Labor, Education, Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Defense, and others.

Additional details for most projects, particularly about annual funding levels and requests, can be found in the Appendix to this report. Also, the Appendix provides a more specific listing by name of individual NGOs (or other implementing partners) involved with particular U.S.-supported assistance projects. The bulk of U.S. assistance is indeed channeled, as suggested in the Afghan Women and Children Relief Act, through a wide range of such institutions. In order to avoid any impression of partiality, however, the narrative portion of this report alludes more generically to the NGOs involved with U.S. programs in Afghanistan.

The coordination of these diverse efforts is a daunting task, directed by the appropriate departmental and interagency mechanisms, with overall guidance from the National Security Council. On women's issues in particular, an important coordinating and operational role is played by the Department of State's Office of International Women's Issues, whose Senior Coordinator reports directly to the Under Secretary for Global Affairs. The Administration believes that this coordination is reflected in the thematic presentation that follows as well as in the good results on the ground inside Afghanistan. The mandated focus of this report, however, and the vast amount of intricate but essentially extraneous detail on some projects that may be marginally relevant to it, do not permit this to be an entirely exhaustive account.

Furthermore, this report appropriately concentrates on U.S. policies and programs. It alludes only tangentially to the very active and important multilateral and non-governmental dimensions of Afghanistan's recovery efforts and overall situation, including that of Afghan women, children, and refugees. The United States has been by far the single largest donor of humanitarian assistance to Afghans for many years, and remains so today. From October 1, 2001, through May 10, 2002, this U.S. humanitarian contribution totaled $379 million. In material terms, to cite the largest component of this longstanding pattern, the United States supplied 80 percent of all food aid for Afghanistan through the World Food Program (WFP) in FY 2001—and the United States accounts for 76 percent of the corresponding total to date in FY 2002.

More recently, the United States pledged $296.75 million for Afghan reconstruction at the Tokyo donors' conference in January 2002. A request for $250 million in supplemental funds for Afghanistan was submitted to Congress as well. Yet the United States is by no means alone. At the conference in Tokyo, the international community pledged $4.5 billion for the long-term reconstruction of Afghanistan, of which $1.8 billion are slated for expenditure in the coming year. Clearly, this will be a global effort requiring global resources.

As of this writing, it appears that the most acute humanitarian aid requirements for Afghanistan are fully subscribed by the international donor community. The challenge ahead, however, is to achieve and maintain an adequate level of support for longer-term reconstruction and capacity-building programs in the next several years, so that this devastated country can be put on a realistic path out of its current highly dependent state. We must also ensure that the fate of women, children, and refugees remains a priority in Afghanistan's overall reconstruction, even after the topic disappears from the daily headlines.

As we work to meet these twin challenges, the United States intends both to play a leadership role, and to foster a concerted multilateral effort. The results of our ongoing efforts to address this important coordination issue, which by definition is a medium- to long-term one, will be presented in future reports. In the meantime, some initial promising steps in this direction have been taken by the international community, with strong U.S. political and material support.

In March 2002, coordination of international efforts in Afghanistan was improved greatly by the creation, and endorsement by the UN Security Council, of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to oversee all pertinent activity in the country. In managing this plethora of programs, the UN Secretary-General has vowed that "human rights and gender issues will be central to the purpose and functions of the mission," and charged it to seek "advisory expertise … in the areas of human rights, the rule of law (judicial, police, and penal system) and gender equality."

The United States collaborates closely on Afghanistan with UN bodies, and with many relevant NGOs, in order to exploit comparative advantages, avoid duplication of effort, and thereby optimize the results to the maximum feasible degree. A good example is funding for Afghanistan's new Ministry of Women's Affairs. The United States very actively supports this important ministry in many ways, as discussed below. But it is difficult to isolate this U.S. contribution in dollar terms, because most of our direct funding for Afghan government institutions has been funneled through the UNDP Afghan Interim Authority Fund. That body collects contributions for the Afghan government as a whole, and makes allocations to individual ministries as required. In addition to such overall financial support, USAID and other U.S. agencies have made smaller grants, cited later in this report, directly to the Ministry of Women's Affairs, earmarked for particular projects or infrastructure.

Moreover, looking at the needs of, and potential resources for, this ministry in global perspective, U.S. allocations take into account confirmed contributions from other sources. This helps coordinate overall assistance for Afghan women, children, and refugees, and the Afghan reconstruction campaign as a whole. In the specific case of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, for example, U.S. funding takes into account a firm pledge from the government of Belgium for $500,000 in direct financial support for that ministry.

More broadly, however, detailed description or analysis of non-U.S. programs in Afghanistan, or even of the numerous such programs focused on women, children, or refugees, is beyond the scope of this report. We understand that the World Bank is currently preparing tables organizing and summarizing data about various multilateral and bilateral aid projects in Afghanistan. In addition, a women's organization is working on a detailed listing of the diverse NGOs currently active in that country. As these documents become available, we intend to refer to and make use of them in subsequent reports.

Third, keeping the discussion of Afghan women, children, and refugees in context requires at least some initial examination of the overall security and economic challenges in Afghanistan today, and of ongoing U.S. efforts to meet them. A brief contextual presentation along those lines constitutes the next section of this report.

Overall Situation in Afghanistan

Afghanistan today is only beginning to recover from one of the world's worst man-made disasters, aggravated by an unforgiving natural environment. Its economy has been broken; its infrastructure has been decimated; hunger, disease, war, and repression have beaten down its people. Nearly two decades of civil strife, followed by five more years of brutal misrule by the Taliban, have literally reduced significant parts of the country to rubble. At the same time, during the past three years, the worst drought in at least a generation has devastated Afghanistan's agriculture, the traditional mainstay (70-80 percent) of its labor force and overall economic activity.

The problems in Afghanistan are complex and much remains to be accomplished. In the short term, extraordinary efforts are still necessary to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs of the Afghan people. But at the same time, the United States is heartened by the initial progress toward a new era of peace, stability, and economic reconstruction in Afghanistan. With that progress will come new hope of dignity and opportunity for Afghan women, children, and refugees. The fall of the Taliban and the creation of an interim administration to guide the country toward a permanent broad-based government have begun to brighten Afghanistan's future, even as important challenges remain.

Beginning in March, thousands of students—both boys and girls—have started studying hard in repaired schools, using new school supplies. Wells have been dug, and irrigation canals that were silted up for years are now carrying water. Tens of thousands of tons of food have been delivered around the country. Construction kits are being delivered all over Afghanistan, allowing citizens to repair their own homes. Medical care and immunizations have been provided to hundreds of thousands of Afghans, to whom virtually nothing was available just months ago, especially to women. Roads have been repaired. Libraries and veterinary clinics have been reopened for the first time in many years.

The following section gives an overall assessment of the challenges met and still underway in Afghanistan, and of the U.S. response to them: first in the security and then in the economic realm. It is against this backdrop that the intensive U.S. effort to implement the Afghan Women and Children's Relief Act continues to unfold.

Security: Challenge and Response

The general situation in Afghanistan is still not fully stable, reflecting a fluid political and military environment. We remain concerned about potential volatility as the Afghan government continues to attempt to assert control over a country characterized by over two decades of war, natural disaster and instability.

Security issues facing the country, particularly in remote areas, include continuing military operations, landmines, and banditry, which is sometimes

associated with drug trafficking. Insecurity clearly impedes the reconstruction process, including efforts to ameliorate conditions for Afghan women, children, and refugees.

To address these challenges, the U.S. government is assisting the Afghans with both direct military assistance and training to help them establish their own security institutions and operations. U.S. and allied forces are hunting down remaining Taliban and Al-Qaida fighters, and assisting the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul. When ISAF's mandate came up for extension in June, we supported extending its tenure through the end of this year. We are helping to train an Afghan army, and contributing to the training and equipping of an Afghan police force. Moreover, we are using special forces and civil affairs teams, as appropriate, to help local commanders deal with contentious issues and discourage conflict among the ranks.

The FY 02 Emergency Supplemental Request for Afghanistan includes substantial sums dedicated to enhancing Afghanistan's security and political stability. While the details of this package are beyond the scope of this report, major categories and projected costs include Economic Support Funds (ESF) to help finance the country's Transitional Administration and political process, at $50 million; ESF programs to support demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, at $30 million; Peacekeeping Operations (PKO), at $20 million; and Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to train and outfit Afghanistan's new national army, at $50 million.

We are also continuing a very active campaign to minimize the landmine threat. The Department of State estimates that as many as four million landmines still lie in wait in Afghanistan, with deaths and injuries averaging approximately 200 each month. In addition to these direct casualties, landmines prevent children from attending school, water wells from being fully utilized, and land from being tilled. They obstruct commerce from safely traversing roads and bridges, and instill lasting psychological trauma in those continually at risk. And while women may not fight as often as men in battle, they may nevertheless, as Secretary Powell has observed, become "the victims of landmine accidents, because they tend to be the collectors of firewood and water and do the heavy fieldwork."

This year, the Department of State has committed $7 million to support mine clearance and mine education efforts. Most of these funds are spent directly on physical mine clearance and protection projects. In fact, humanitarian demining is regrettably the largest "industry" in Afghanistan today, employing over 4,500 deminers and support staff.

In another portion of this program, beginning this month and continuing over the next year, we will spend approximately $700,000 for mine risk education initiatives, mainly oriented toward Afghan children. This will be carried out via a grant to UNICEF, using the U.S. NGO Save the Children as implementing

partner and local Afghan NGOs as subcontractors to bring this vital message to Afghan schools and radio programs. We have committed an additional $700,000 to conduct two surveys on new contamination by landmines and unexploded ordinance, and on the status of national disabilities and injuries. These surveys will aid relief workers in preventing further injuries, guide landmine removal, and support victims' assistance programs.

On the counternarcotics front, which generally affects women and children only indirectly but bears on the overall security climate, the Department of State has budgeted $5 million for FY 02 and $6 million for FY 03. In addition, we have requested a major increase, of $60 million, in FY 02 supplemental funding for a comprehensive, interagency counternarcotics effort. This would include police training and administration of justice, and related program development and support. These funds would support poppy eradication and alternative agriculture and other employment programs, and assist in establishing a drug control coordination office and a professional cadre of police and judicial and legal personnel.

The Economy: Challenge and Response

The nature and magnitude of the economic challenge in Afghanistan can be grasped in a few simple sentences and statistics. Most of Afghanistan's institutions, and much of its physical infrastructure, lie in ruins. Around half the total population of 25 million has been relegated to abject poverty; malnutrition is widespread. More than six million Afghans are at least partially dependent on food aid. No more than half of working-age Afghans are able to find any employment, and a mere 30 percent can read and write in any language.

The scale of such problems is matched by the scale of U.S. assistance to Afghanistan. Even before September 11 of last year, the United States was easily the largest single donor to Afghanistan in the world; and Afghanistan received more U.S. humanitarian aid (as distinct from development or military assistance) than any other country, amounting to well over $100 million annually for the previous several years. In pre-September 11 FY 01, this figure had already risen to $174 million, reflecting acute humanitarian needs related to the increasingly severe drought conditions in the country.

Since then, in the current fiscal year alone, the United States has, as noted above, already contributed $379 million for Afghan relief and reconstruction. In addition, at the Tokyo donors' conference on January 21-22, 2002, the United States pledged $296.75 million for Afghanistan over the coming year, and indicated that at least this amount would be considered for each of the succeeding two years. Of this year's pledge, approximately half--$167 million--is managed by USAID, often channeled through international agencies and NGOs. The remainder consists primarily of direct U.S. government contributions to UNDP and other UN or international institutions. Smaller but still significant

allotments are awarded for programs operating through other agencies, including the Department of State.

In operating this array of programs, every effort is being made to minimize delays due to transport, processing, or other factors, as well as any necessary costs for oversight and administration. The most urgent relief assistance has generally reached its targets very rapidly; reconstruction assistance is moving at the more deliberate pace set by the complex requirements of planning, preparation and consultation. To cite just one relevant statistic, of the $167 million USAID pledge from the January donors' conference, fully two-thirds ($112 million) had been obligated for specific projects by May 2, 2002. In order to further expedite food aid, the most urgent category of assistance, USAID and the Department of Agriculture have worked together to arrange grain "swaps" with Pakistan, and to coordinate massive rapid commodity shipments to Afghanistan through Central Asian as well as other neighboring countries with the UN's World Food Program (WFP).

Thus far, the U.S. response to the economic challenge has been dominated by efforts to meet the most immediate and acute economic subsistence needs of the Afghan people: food, water, shelter, and medicine. In the first category, that of food supplies, we are moving beyond urgent relief to rehabilitation of what was once a thriving agricultural economy. Since October 2001, the WFP, with the support of USAID, has delivered over 400,000 tons of food to Afghanistan, of which the vast majority (at least 340,000 tons) has been successfully distributed throughout the areas of greatest need in the country.

While the United States will continue such efforts, we also want to bring more lasting assurance of food security to Afghanistan. A good first step was taken recently with the delivery of 7,000 tons of wheat seed to Afghan farmers, whose seed stocks were otherwise too depleted to plant a new crop. The provision of agricultural staples and equipment, along with education for farmers and renovation of irrigation systems will help Afghanistan regain its agricultural self-sufficiency.

U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID's) current annual level of comprehensive support for WFP activities in Afghanistan accounts for approximately $100 million, an understandably large figure in light of the extraordinary requirements of the moment. The FY 02 emergency supplemental request to Congress for Afghanistan includes an additional $40 million for International Disaster Assistance, mainly aimed at rehabilitating the agricultural sector, so that it can "graduate" from this degree of dependence. This program, if approved, would feature projects targeted to provide income generation opportunities for women, while incorporating functional literacy training, along with expansion of micro-credit programs for women.

Looking further ahead, as we progress in meeting Afghanistan's immediate and medium-term needs, we will broaden our efforts to encompass longer-term objectives for the reconstruction of the country. The United States has four basic objectives for this effort: to repair the damaged Afghan infrastructure and stabilize political and economic conditions there; to help establish a lasting system of good governance for the Afghan people; to restore food security and health services; and to repatriate and reintegrate Afghan refugees.

Within that framework, the pace and many of the details of this long-term undertaking must, as noted above, take fully into account indigenous capabilities, sensitivities, and constraints. This may give some cause for caution, but also for hope. For, as an NGO report correctly notes,

> One of the most encouraging elements in the current reconstruction process … is the extent to which Afghans remain committed to rebuilding their own society, and the indomitable spirit they bring to that endeavor. [*Filling the Vacuum*, p. 42]

It is important to emphasize that, in addition to specific initiatives targeted for women, the reconstruction program as a whole deliberately includes women as direct participants and beneficiaries. For example, teacher training and textbook distribution programs reach out to female teachers, students, and schools. In addition, U.S.-administered health projects focus particularly on maternal and child health issues.

Situation of Women and Children in Afghanistan

The story of Afghan women and children over the preceding quarter-century, and especially during the past five or six years, is one of extremes: from relative tranquility and emancipation to violence, privation, and oppression—and lately at least the first steps back again. To put the current situation in perspective, it is worth noting that the degree of oppression suffered by women under Taliban rule was an aberration in modern Afghan history. It is true that, before the Taliban took power in 1996, Afghanistan was a traditional society where women often had a subordinate role. Nevertheless, in the 1970's, women made up a significant proportion of all teachers in the country, and a smaller but significant percentage of all doctors and civil servants.

The situation of Afghan women, as of Afghan society as a whole, deteriorated in many ways as a result of the Soviet invasion in late 1979 and the long civil war that followed. Millions of men and women, probably around one-fifth of the entire population, were forced to take refuge outside the country, mainly to neighboring Pakistan and Iran. Millions more were internally displaced inside Afghanistan itself, swelling the population of Kabul well beyond its absorptive capacity. The lawlessness, endemic warfare, and general insecurity of this era created particular problems for women, including widespread violence, deprivation of sustenance, and disruption of family and social life.

Yet it was the rise of the Taliban to power in Kabul that took the greatest toll on Afghanistan's women. Women who had previously participated in the larger society, particularly in urban areas such as Kabul, found themselves largely confined to their homes.

Under Taliban rule, the women of Afghanistan were denied the opportunity to engage in the political, economic, or social life of their country. They were deprived of their rights to private property and free speech. And they were barred from access to equal justice or education, and routinely obstructed from obtaining even basic health care. Girls could not go to school; there was a brutally enforced restrictive dress code; and women were forbidden from venturing outside their homes without a male relative. As First Lady Laura Bush put it on March 8, 2002, on the occasion of International Women's Day, "Afghanistan under the Taliban gave the world a sobering example of a country where women were denied their rights and their place in society."

As a direct consequence of these Taliban depredations, coupled with the ensuing conflict and the country's other severe tribulations and traditions, Afghan women were subjected to extraordinary hardship over a protracted period. Their situation as of early 2002, to cite a report from the new Ministry of Women's Affairs in Kabul, was dire:

> Most women in Afghanistan are without adequate food; do not have jobs or economic livelihood; have little or no access to health care, especially reproductive health care services; have had limited or no access to education; and have experienced violence to themselves or their families.

This predicament, largely the legacy of the Taliban, is now beginning to lighten. Since the Taliban's defeat, both the political and the practical conditions of Afghan women have improved considerably, although additional work is clearly required to sustain this transformation. Women are now able to travel more freely in the cities; they are beginning to return to work; and schools for both girls and boys have reopened. Equally important, women are now receiving the health care deprived to them for years. The U.S. delegation to the UN Commission on the Status of Women sponsored a resolution on women in Afghanistan, cosponsored by 46 other states, welcoming the positive steps the Afghan government has taken to include women in the recovery and reconstruction process, but also urging that this progress continue and expand.

In the domain of democracy building, the removal of the Taliban also offered a rare opportunity to remake the political culture and institutions of Afghanistan in a fashion that offered greater recognition of and respect for women's rights. Possibly the most visible sign of change in Afghanistan is the appointment of women to important political positions after a long period in which women were not permitted to have any part in public life. With the strong encouragement of the United States, two women were appointed to the Afghan Interim Authority: Dr. Sima Samar, AIA Vice Chair and Minister of Women's Affairs; and Dr. Suhaila Siddiq, Minister of Public Health. (The latter was reappointed to newly elected President Karzai's transitional government Cabinet on June 24, while Dr. Samar moved over to head a new Human Rights Commission and another woman, Habiba Sorabi, took over the Ministry of Woman's Affairs.) In addition, three women were appointed to the 21-member Commission organizing the Emergency Loya Jirga, including Vice Chair Dr. Mahbuba Hoquqmal. Today, Afghan women and men are working together as political decision-makers, recovery planners, program implementers, opinion leaders, and community organizers.

According to numerous accounts from diverse sources, Afghan women now often feel comfortable moving around Kabul unescorted. This is obviously in sharp contrast to the oppressive circumstances there under Taliban rule just months earlier. Meanwhile, however, women continue to be cautious in traveling outside the cities; and many continue to wear the burqa (the traditional garb in many parts of Afghanistan) when outdoors, in both the cities and the countryside. Another recent NGO report ventured the following insightful analysis of the ambiguities surrounding women in Afghanistan today:

> Discrimination against and exploitation of women and girls will not change overnight, and rapid imposition of outside agendas can cause a variety of

> problems for women. Numerous [Afghan] women interviewed reported feeling concerned that rapid changes in gender equity might actually worsen their already precarious economic and social conditions. Rapid change can also evoke backlash from men and increase the risk of violence against women, particularly in the home. Far from being reasons for inaction, these are reminders that the work on this key protection issue needs to be long-term, situationally appropriate, and designed to limit first the most harmful practices.
> [*After the Taliban: A Child-Focused Assessment in the Northern Afghan Provinces of Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakhsh*an, CCF International/Child Fund Afghanistan, April 2002, pp. 22-23.]

In the meantime, there are also plausible anecdotal reports about the resumption of social pressure against women in various parts of the country. In Kandahar, for example, there have reportedly been leaflets threatening girl students and their female teachers. In response to such fears, the governor of this province has assigned an armed guard to every school, but the underlying problems remain.

In Ghazni, just a few hours drive from Kabul, where two women went on the air in late April as reporters for a local radio station, broadcasting two hours each evening from transmitters donated by the U.S. military. One of them, formerly a refugee in Pakistan and also a doctor, told a visiting American that, for the first time in her life, now that she is back in Afghanistan she wears a burqa to venture outside her home, because of the tradition in town. At the hospital where she works, she added, "many of our patients are beaten by the families, beaten by their husbands. There is not human rights for the woman of Ghazni." In Herat, a U.S. reporter asked Governor Ismail Khan whether women are more restricted in his province than in other parts of Afghanistan. "We should not expect freedom to be given right away," he replied. "The people are not ready for it." [Susan B. Glasser, "An Unfinished Country," *The Washington Post*, May 12, 2002, pp. A1, 14-15.]

In a similar vein, in the Charikar region about 50 miles north of Kabul, anecdotal accounts of the unfolding Loya Jirga process seem to illustrate the practical limits on women's political empowerment, despite the promises on paper. According to this journalistic report from early May,

> … not a single woman was present at mass meetings held this week to prepare for the Loya Jirga, and only three women participated in the voting for delegates from seven districts…. Although the Loya Jirga rules stipulate that women should actively participate in the process, Afghan tradition dictates that women, especially in rural areas, do not venture out of their homes or mingle with men in public. In the Charikar region, most women are illiterate, which means they would automatically be disqualified from the Loya

> Jirga, but even female teachers in villages there said their families and neighbors have strongly discouraged them from participating. [Pamela Constable, "Afghan Militia Leaders Lurk on Path to Elections," *The Washington Post*, May 11, 2002, p. A18]

To keep this in context, however, it must be noted that as of mid-May 2002, with around one month still to go before the Loya Jirga was scheduled to convene in Kabul, over 40 women had been elected as delegates to the local councils choosing participants to send to the capital from various districts around the country. This is in addition to the 163 seats (out of a total of some 1,500) reserved for women delegates by the Commission that fashioned this assembly.

In fact, the saga of the Loya Jirga can perhaps be viewed as a rough microcosm of Afghanistan's recent experience in general, and of Afghanistan's women in particular. There has been tremendous progress in the remarkably short time since the removal of the Taliban; great promise for the future; yet a long way to go in bridging the gap. It is against this mixed backdrop that U.S. activities aimed at doing precisely that are taking place in Afghanistan today, as described in the following section of this report.

U.S. Support for Afghan Women and Children: Survey of Current Activities

Both the central rationale and the overarching target for ongoing U.S. efforts on behalf of Afghan women were expressed by President Bush in his message to the inaugural meeting of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council on April 24, 2002:

> For years, during the ruinous tyranny of the Taliban, Americans were rightly outraged by the brutal repression of Afghan women. Today, Afghan women are enjoying new freedoms and opportunities. Now is the time for America and the world to demonstrate more than just sympathy for past injustices. We must work together to offer them real support for a better future.

In implementing this guidance, overall U.S.-supported programs in Afghanistan are designed specifically to give Afghan women the schooling, medical attention, skills and tools they need to obtain jobs, support their families, and integrate into the political and public life of this new stage of Afghan history. We are committed to helping Afghans build a nation where all citizens have the freedom and resources to pursue both an education and a livelihood. In this connection, it is important to recall that the improvement of conditions for women is likely to be both a cause and a consequence of Afghanistan's overall reconstruction process. As Secretary Powell said in March,

> … if women are the prime victims of conflict, they are also key to a society's recovery from that conflict. And so, for example, we make assistance to women's organizations and ministries of women's affairs part of our broader post-conflict strategy of promoting civil society, representative government, and sound economic policies. Perhaps most important of all, women play far-reaching roles in the prevention of conflict by helping to create conditions that are healthy and stabilizing over the long term. That is why women are major beneficiaries of our development assistance, child survival funds, economic support funds, and high-impact programs in the areas of health care, HIV/AIDS, education and micro-financing.

Accordingly, the varied array of U.S. programs benefiting women and children in Afghanistan will be considered below under two broad headings. First is Institutional Support, which covers current efforts to help Afghans create their own lasting, organizational mechanisms and management structures to take ownership of the overall effort to better the lives of women and children in their society. This category is represented by U.S. assistance for Afghanistan's own Ministry of Women's Affairs, and by participation in the bilateral, public/private partnership organized as the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council.

The second broad heading considered below is Program Support, which covers specific concrete projects currently underway that directly impact the target populations of Afghan women and their families. This category is subdivided

below into three well-defined program areas: Education and Health, Political Participation, and Economic Participation. It should be noted that, in all of these areas, the purposely inclusive nature of many programs, and the benefits derived from them by those affected who are women or children, make it impossible to isolate a precise dollar figure for U.S. support intended strictly or solely for the latter groups. In addition, representative programs that focus more narrowly on either children or refugees will be considered in brief separate sections that follow those immediately below.

Institutional Support for Afghan Women and Children: Current Activities

The Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs

The Afghan Interim Authority (AIA), formed as a result of the Bonn Agreement of December 2001 and headed by Chairman Hamid Karzai, included a Ministry of Women's Affairs in its Cabinet. The ministry's mission, in the words of its own strategic plan, is "to restore and improve the rights of Afghan women, and to improve their legal, economic, political and social status throughout the country." Dr. Sima Samar, who established effective working relations throughout the U.S. Government, including with the Department of State and USAID, first headed the ministry. Today, in the new transitional government formed through the Loya Jirga, the Ministry of Women's Affairs is led by Dr. Habiba Sorabi, appointed to that post on June 26. In addition, former Loya Jirga Commission Vice Chair Mahbuba Hoquqmal now serves as Minister of State for Women's Affairs.

The United States contributed significant assistance to the AIA as a whole, and to the Women's Ministry in particular. The Bush Administration donated $4 million to the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP's) Afghan Interim Authority Fund to cover start-up costs for all ministries. A percentage of this contribution provided the Ministry of Women's Affairs with two computers, a satellite telephone, office furniture and supplies, and a vehicle. It also helped rehabilitate the Ministry's offices and assisted in the preparation of payrolls so that the staff could receive their salaries.

In addition to this contribution through the UNDP, the United States has contributed directly to the Ministry's refurbishment through USAID, which has provided $64,000 toward the renovation of a suitable building, including an initial 11 office spaces, office equipment, and technical advisers. In a meeting on February 19, 2002 with U.S. Charge Ryan Crocker, Minister Samar noted with pleasure that Women's Affairs was the first ministry in the AIA to obtain a grant directly from the U.S. government.

With substantial monetary and technical assistance from USAID (and from other bilateral and international agencies, including UNIFEM), the ministry's first priority has been to staff up and establish the basic physical plant needed to make future activities possible. Beginning with rudimentary office space and equipment,

USAID support has progressed to funding for a state-of-the-art media and telecommunications resource center, complete with satellite, video, and Internet hook-ups unparalleled anywhere else in the country. To ensure that these impressive new capabilities can be put to good use, the Department of State is partnering with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the private sector through the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council, to launch a prototype women's computer education International Visitors program. Plans call for training a core group of 18 participants this fall.

Even as these early, capacity-building steps get underway, the Ministry of Women's Affairs is playing a helpful political role in Cabinet-level advocacy for restoration of women's rights. This applies specifically to restoration of women's jobs in other government ministries—with promotions to compensate for the years of work and seniority lost under Taliban rule. It has also reinforced the commitment to a reserved proportion (11% minimum) of seats for women delegates to the Loya Jirga. In addition, at the practical level, the ministry conducted a consultation for 60 women from nine different provinces, oversaw placement exams for female students, and spearheaded the successful reopening of schools for girls in March 2002.

Now that this central ministry is open for business, the next step in institutional development will be to reach out to women at the local level. The plan is to open a Women's Center in each one of Afghanistan's 32 provinces, plus Mini Women's Centers in each of Kabul's 16 districts. These local units will be focal points for helping women access education, training, reproductive health care, employment and career information, and informal networking opportunities. USAID and the Department of State have already committed $160,000 to help fund these centers.

We envision a partnership between U.S. and international donors in setting up this network, with UNIFEM likely providing the wherewithal for its physical facilities, while USAID supports technical advisors to assist the Women's Ministry in establishing operations and developing programs. The United States will continue to consider requests for assistance from this and all other ministries of the Interim Authority and its official successors in Afghanistan.

The U.S.-Afghan Women's Council

Another important institutional component of U.S. support for women's full participation in Afghanistan's political, economic, and cultural life is the creation of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council. This new organization will help promote partnerships between the public and private sectors, as well as between the two countries and governments concerned. Its key function will be to mobilize and bring together resources, expertise, and networking capabilities across governments, NGOs, and private companies—and target them specifically toward practical projects for women that might otherwise be missed in the welter of Afghan reconstruction activities. It will focus on concrete actions that help

bring real benefits to the women of Afghanistan, starting with the most urgent priorities: education, health, vocational training, and small-scale credit to help launch productive enterprises.

The Council, established by President Bush and Chairman Karzai in January 2002, is co-chaired by the U.S. Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs and the Afghan Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of Women's Affairs. Members include several distinguished American figures from academia, foundations, and the media; additional American and Afghan leaders from the business, government, and other sectors are expected to join. The group held its first formal meeting in Washington, DC on April 24, 2002. President Bush, in a White House message to mark the occasion, welcomed the Council's efforts to "promote public and private partnerships … so that Afghan women can gain the skills and education they need to fulfill their rightful role in society."

At its inaugural meeting, the Council agreed to undertake a targeted computer education project as its first initiative. This project, which will bring 18 Afghan female government workers to the United States for a month of intensive training, will be underway by September, with initial funding from the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. As Under Secretary of State Paula Dobriansky noted, "Giving Afghan women working at government ministries the skills to use computers responds directly to a priority issue raised by Minister [of Women's Affairs] Samar and other Afghan women, and will enable them—in each of their ministries—to become more effective advocates and implementers of programs that benefit women." If approved by Congress, supplemental funding that we have requested would make possible the expansion of this and similar Council programs for Afghan women workers and students, into the autumn months and beyond.

At the same time, looking to leverage this relatively modest level of government funding, the Council is working with the AOL Time Warner Foundation, Gateway, and others in the private sector to secure the donation of laptops, printers, and other computer equipment to ensure that the program participants return to Afghanistan with new hardware as well as increased knowledge, skills, and professional contacts. And the Council is working with another private sector marketing firm, Grafik, Inc., to design a website for the Council that will greatly enhance its outreach to potential members, donors, and other supporters both at home and abroad.

In this fashion, the Council promises to reach effectively across borders, and across the public sector-private sector divide, to forge a valuable collaboration that will identify priorities, publicize, and gather support for creative new efforts to improve the lives of Afghan women. It is quite consciously designed to be directly responsive to their own considered requests, and to supplement rather than substitute for the larger-scale efforts of purely official programs.

Program Support for Afghan Women and Children: Current Activities

Education and Health

Consistent with the provisions of the 2001 Afghan Women and Children Relief Act, the United States has provided substantial funds for education and health projects inside Afghanistan. A significant amount of these funds have been channeled through NGOs. Additional substantial programs are specifically oriented toward Afghan refugees, both inside and outside their country. These programs are largely channeled through international and local organizations, as discussed in a separate section below.

On March 23, 2002, schools for girls reopened in Afghanistan after many years of enforced closure. Thousands of Afghan girls and boys entered the classroom for the first time in their lives. To assist in this landmark event, and help ensure that such major progress continues, the United States spent $6.9 million for nearly 10 million Dari- and Pashto-language textbooks in science, math, and reading for grades 1-12, along with 4,000 teacher-training kits. Five million of these books arrived in time for the reopening of schools. In addition, USAID is funding 20 teams of five teacher trainers to conduct four-week training session with 4,000 educators. A noteworthy feature is that half of the trainers, as well as half of the educators who will participate in this ambitious program, are women.

Through a global consortium of companies, individuals, and NGOs, we have sent fabric and sewing machines so that Afghan women can make school uniforms for girls. The Department of Labor has allotted $300,000 to pay the seamstresses' salaries. In other educational projects, the USG has further obligated $200,000 to send teams of teacher trainers and educators to develop curricula. In addition, the Department of State has contributed $68,000 toward the refurbishment of the women's dormitory at the University of Kabul, which will allow women to remain on campus in a secure environment.

Also, USAID supports the World Food Program's (WFP's) pilot food-for-education project, which is providing nutritious school meals to children in several districts of the remote province of Badakhshan, in northeastern Afghanistan. This project is slated to expand nationwide to cover one million school children in the near future. In implementing this initiative, boys and girls receive wheat flour for regular school attendance; girls receive an additional five liters of vegetable oil every month as an extra incentive. This is an especially effective device to encourage even tradition-bound families to send their girls to school. A separate USAID-funded program is encouraging Afghan women and girls to read by hosting reading classes and improving the country's libraries. USAID monies finance the training of library staff and the purchase of books.

While the large majority of these projects are intended to take place inside Afghanistan, for reasons both of principle and of practical impact, there are several related programs that will require travel abroad for additional professional

training and exposure. An example is a small-scale Afghan Women Teacher Training Program planned by the State Department, which will bring about a dozen female Afghan basic education specialists to the U.S. for a 3-4 week teacher training program in curriculum and materials development, computer literacy, and train-the-trainer techniques. In order not to interfere with the Afghan school year, this project is tentatively scheduled to occur in January or February of 2003.

In the field of public health, the United States has provided funds and staff for support UNICEF's vaccination campaign, targeting 2.26 million boys and girls in its initial phase. In FY 02, USAID will provide $10.65 million to support health services nationwide, including $5 million to the Afghan Ministry of Health for maternal and child health care services and other funding for local and international NGO partners on the ground. At the grass-roots voluntary level here at home, American boys and girls, through the Fund for Afghan Children, have contributed over $4 million to pay for food, shelter, clothing, health care, and toys for their Afghan counterparts.

Political Participation

Through grants to NGOs, the United States has aided efforts to help Afghan women improve the environment for women's human rights, address systematic violations, and increase their participation in the political process. The United States developed and supported similar programs in Peshawar, Pakistan, where hundreds of Afghan refugee women received training and formed women's groups to address the security and law enforcement problems they confronted. U.S. assistance also enabled the participation of more than 500 such women in a Women's Loya Jirga on the reconstruction of Afghanistan, and helped delegations of Afghan women to participate in major international gatherings in Bonn and Brussels. In addition, U.S. support helped an NGO based in Kabul to train women for participation in the Emergency Loya Jirga in June and the subsequent political process.

In the first half of 2002, USAID provided assistance to several NGOs to open liaison offices in Kabul. One of these groups is training Afghan women's rights leaders to develop human rights advocacy skills. It is also facilitating alliances between Afghan and Pakistani women's rights groups to help Afghan women refugees, and to assist these groups in addressing religious extremism in the region. In April, the Department of State funded a women's mentoring program in which six female political and human rights advocates from Afghanistan traveled to the United States for public affairs training and networking with Afghan-American community leaders and other NGOs, including local women's groups.

A separate small grant from the Department of State's regional Public Diplomacy Office is slated for a women's workshop on "Becoming Full Participants in

Democracy." This project will team up Afghan and American women's NGOs to help develop leadership and advocacy experience and skills, and foster a network of contacts with similar, successful grass-roots organizations in the United States, Africa, and Japan.

In assisting Afghans with the formation of permanent government, we do not intend to install a clone of American democracy. Rather, we hope that the permanent government will be consistent with both the unique culture and traditions of Afghanistan as well as democratic ideals of accountability, inclusion, transparency and equality. Only a democratic government that is specifically tailored to the needs of Afghans will change Afghanistan from a country of violence and poverty to one of stability and prosperity. But the transition to democracy cannot be made without instilling in society a respect for the basic human rights and dignities of all Afghans—including Afghan women whose rights were so cruelly denied by the Taliban. This is indeed a delicate balance, one that will require constant creativity and pragmatism to move forward at a reasonable rate.

Economic Participation

U.S. efforts in this sphere focus first on re-integrating women into their local economies to become self-sufficient. In addition to programs that will help provide immediate employment opportunities for women, vocational training will be supplied for women to learn the skills needed to support themselves and their families. U.S. programs will also work toward opening the ranks of entrepreneurship to women by extending their access to small-scale business credit.

With so many programs underway, this report can only highlight a few of those currently operating under this rubric, including:

- With funding from USAID, the WFP is operating bakeries that employ Afghan widows, and at the same time, provide heavily subsidized bread to Afghanistan's urban poor—particularly women and children. At least 250,000 people will be assisted this year. During the Taliban era, these bakeries were one of the very few places in the country where women could work at all. Today, with support from USAID, the WFP is moving to expand this innovative and highly successful program nationwide.

- USAID and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) are rehabilitating the offices of a Kabul-based NGO that provides educational and vocational courses to women and girls. The grant provides training supplies and equipment, and is increasing the NGO's capacity to offer a more extensive range of courses.

- USAID is funding another NGO to provide returning refugees with job skills, including management training, in order to enhance women's ability to achieve economic independence. This non-political, nonprofit organization aims to promote solidarity and cooperation among Afghan women, and to strengthen their capacity for self-reliance and attainment of their rights. A large number of highly educated, skilled women fled the country during the last decade; we hope that such efforts will encourage more Afghan expatriate women to return home to help transform their nation.

- USAID is working with another NGO to support the establishment of a women's center in the war-ravaged Shomali Plains region north of the capital. The center provides basic education, health instruction, and training for income-generation projects, such as making clothing or quilts for distribution to hospitals, orphanages, schools, and families. This group is in the process of opening four more such centers, in Kabul, Pul-e-Khumri, Maimaneh, and Taloqan, which will benefit more than 5,000 local women.

- The Department of State, with funding from its own South Asia Bureau/Public Diplomacy Small Grants budget, plans to underwrite a Small Business Development Initiative for Women in Afghanistan. This project, to be carried out by an NGO, will prepare half a dozen Afghan women to become trainers in this field through the creation of a Women's Small Business Development Center at the Women's University in Kabul. A Dari-language training manual will be developed as part of the program.

- The Department of Labor has approved $1.5 million to assess women's skills and provide vocational training and start-up wages for women. This program is designed to help participating Afghan women, including the relatively high proportion of family breadwinners among them, negotiate the transition to long-term economic self-sufficiency and participation in the country's career patterns for women working alongside Afghanistan's men.

Proposed U.S. Support for Afghan Women and Children: Near-Term Future Plans

The preceding section of this report describes the current, extensive U.S. institutional and programmatic support for the women and children of Afghanistan. This intensive six-month start-up period provides a firm foundation upon which the United States now intends to build the next phase of combined efforts in this direction. The Administration has forwarded a request to Congress for supplemental funds, which would provide additional programs to assist

Afghan women, children and refugees and displaced persons, both directly and indirectly. In addition to selected proposals already noted above as appropriate, this request includes the following items, grouped under the same broad headings used in the previous discussion:

Education

The United States, as noted above, is currently encouraging education through support for food distribution programs. If supplemental funds are approved, this successful program will be continued and expanded. Children who attend school regularly will not only receive meals during the school day, but will also receive take-home rations for good attendance. This will encourage the entire family to make sure that children's education becomes a high priority. Additional funds will also ensure that the Afghan government will be able pay teachers from the UNDP AIA Fund.

If approved, funds would facilitate Fulbright program academic exchanges as well. These would provide scholarships for students; exchanges for educators and school administrators; partnerships for U.S. colleges and universities with their Afghan counterparts; and English-language training. In many cases, new Afghan participants would be welcomed into expanded regional projects of this kind that have already been successfully operating for a number of years. In other cases, a project under an existing framework would be created exclusively for Afghanistan.

An illustrative proposal, tentatively budgeted at $625,000, is focused on women's training in education. A small group of Fulbright Senior Specialists in this field would be sent to Afghanistan for 2-6 weeks to conduct professional workshops, while 50 women teachers who have demonstrated an exceptional commitment to girls' education will spend time in the U.S. upgrading their skills and preparing to train an additional 500 teachers back inside Afghanistan. In addition, there would be funding for NGOs in the field of education, including much-needed literacy projects.

Health

Supplemental funds would enable the Department of State, USAID, and the Department of Health and Human Services to assist in restoring Afghanistan's primary health care services. A key element would be maternal health and child care services, including training for health care providers to ensure that Afghan women, who have one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, once again have access to child birth services and maternal care. Funds would also provide for the rehabilitation and integration of landmine victims, for polio vaccinations, and for training in nutrition monitoring and education.

Political Participation

If Congress approves this request, funds will be available for programs designed specifically to strengthen women's leadership skills, and to provide training in

conflict resolution and women's advocacy. The Ministry of Women's Affairs has highlighted the desirability of working to reinforce the stature of women delegates and women's issues, both in the Loya Jirga context and on into the next phase of Afghanistan's transitional government and preparations for constitutional reform and longer term electoral self-government.

Economic Participation

Additional funding would allow the United States to continue and expand a program sending wheat to bakeries run by Afghan widows. These bakeries help feed fully one-fourth of Kabul's entire population. Also, if supplemental funds are approved, they would be used to provide access to small-scale credit; to finance women-led businesses; to offer vocational training for the disabled, including women; and to assess women's needs and provide them with management skills.

U.S.-Afghan Women's Council

These funds, if approved, would be used to leverage private sector support for projects that would by undertaken by the Council, which held its first formal meeting on April 24 and has already begun active program planning. The objective, as noted above, is to facilitate partnerships between U.S. and Afghan institutions and mobilize resources to advance women's interests. Initially, the Council plans to focus on education and health projects and on micro-credit for women's enterprises, as part of a broader strategy to encourage women's participation in Afghanistan's overall political and economic sectors.

U.S. Support for Afghan Children: Targeted Programs and Accomplishments

The major U.S. effort to provide food, medicine, schools, books, and other basics for Afghanistan's needy children has already been outlined in the preceding discussion, under the heading of current program support in education and health. The successful back-to-school campaign undertaken in cooperation with UNICEF, Afghan authorities, and other partners was an especially notable achievement. In addition, several U.S.- supported programs that specifically target children-at-risk deserve special mention here.

Through the Department of State, USAID, and the Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. as noted above has contributed funds and staff to launch UNICEF's vaccination campaign. The longer-term goal is to immunize up to nine million Afghan girls and boys against polio. Up to six million susceptible children will also be inoculated against measles—a preventable disease that kills approximately 35,000 vulnerable young Afghans each year. Three million children are also receiving vitamin A capsules to improve their chance of survival from childhood illnesses.

On a much smaller scale, as befits the character of this initiative, the first-ever Seeds of Peace summer camp program for Afghan children is being sponsored by the Department of State. This three-week program for a dozen Afghans in their early teens, evenly divided between boys and girls, is actually underway today. It combines recreation with daily conflict-resolution sessions led by professional facilitators. Participants are expected to develop greater empathy, mutual respect, communications and negotiating skills, hope and confidence—the building blocks of peaceful coexistence.

The FY 02 Emergency Supplemental Request for Afghanistan includes a major ($10 million) item supporting the voluntary reintegration into Afghan society of up to 15,000 child and underage soldiers. This program, if approved, would offer a set of integrated activities including special counseling and training programs for children, coupled with facilitation of reunification with relatives.

The U.S. military also contributes informal but important support for this mission by cultivating good relations with and offering personal assistance to Afghanistan's younger generation. For example, one credible journalistic account from mid-May 2002 describes a Sunday outing by combined Special Forces and U.S. Army infantry troops to a village near Khost, in the unsettled southeastern part of the country. The soldiers visited

> a local school where the 400 students meet outside every day because they have no building. The soldiers strung up three old parachutes to provide a shaded class area, and donated pens, pencils, notebooks and ground mats. "It's good work, [Lt. Col.] Fetterman told the Special Forces commander, "even it it's not what we came here to do."
> [Peter Baker, "G.I.'s Battle 'Ghosts' in Afghanistan,"
> *The Washington Post*, May 16, 2002, pp. A1, A16.

Around the country, the U.S. military has earmarked several million dollars for humanitarian projects. Overseas Humanitarian Disaster Assistance and Civic Action funds, controlled by the Department of Defense, have been used in 48 schools across Afghanistan. In addition, some military units have pooled personal funds to purchase school supplies.

It is obviously impossible to quantify the effects of such interactions, but each one represents a modest, but potentially far-reaching, incremental investment in the future of Afghanistan's rising generation—and of the deep reservoir of goodwill toward the United States that their liberation from the Taliban has created.

U.S. Support for Afghan Refugees: Targeted Programs and Accomplishments

Repatriation and resettlement of refugees are important aspects of life for Afghanistan's people where—as a direct result of U.S. and international support and Afghans' own efforts—progress has actually exceeded expectations. The conventional wisdom was that the recent conflict would set in motion a substantial flow of refugees out of Afghanistan. In fact, precisely the reverse has occurred: a large-scale return of refugees to Afghanistan has already begun.

In just the first two months of voluntary repatriation programs after the fall of the Taliban, according to the UN High Commissioner on Refugees, over 350,000 refugees—approximately 10 percent of the estimated total in neighboring states—were successfully returned home under those auspices. This includes 140,000 Afghan refugees who were repatriated from Pakistan in March 2002 alone. By May 16, 2002, the overall number of these voluntary repatriations had climbed to 616,000—of which 550,000 were from Pakistan, 44,000 from Iran, and the remainder mostly from the neighboring Central Asian states (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan). By mid-June the overall number was fast approaching the million mark.

From October 1, 2001 through April 2, 2002, the Department of State spent $94.1 million for Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), in Afghanistan itself, Pakistan, and elsewhere. These funds were expended to build NGO capacity, support female education, offer drought relief, supply health care (including maternal health care), and provide nutrition, water and sanitation, mine awareness, civic programs, and teacher training. The United States pledged at the Tokyo Donors' Conference an additional $52 million to facilitate the repatriation and reintegration of refugees and IDPs. Many of the kinds of projects listed above, which until now have been undertaken primarily in refugee camps in Pakistan, will henceforth be adjusted as the emphasis shifts toward the needs of returnees inside Afghanistan.

At the same time, given the best realistic estimates of the sustainable flow of what should be entirely voluntary repatriation, we foresee a continuing need to maintain programs and services for the refugees remaining outside Afghanistan's boundaries for the time being. Some modest new programs tailored to today's circumstances are also in the planning stages. One example is a small grant for trauma training and counseling for Afghan refugees. This program will focus on training local counselors for victims of war and terrorism in the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan.

Primary responsibility for managing this dimension of U.S. efforts on behalf of the Afghan people rests with the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). The Bureau's major partners in this effort are the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and other UN agencies. PRM also provides funding to NGOs, including Mercy

Corps International and the International Catholic Migration Commission, to fill critical protection and assistance gaps for refugees in Afghanistan and surrounding countries.

Conclusion: Results So Far, Challenges Ahead

The long-term goal of U.S. engagement with Afghanistan was announced by President Bush in a joint statement with Chairman Karzai on January 28, 2002, and reinforced by the President in his message to the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council on April 24, 2002: "We jointly pledged to build a lasting American-Afghan partnership to help Afghanistan forge a future free from terror, want, and war. We also recognized the shared goal of an Afghan government that respects and is accountable to all Afghans, men and women alike."

These ideals will guide U.S. policy over a long and challenging path. The prospects for Afghan women, and particularly the necessarily long-term nature of even the most determined efforts to improve their quality of life, were well summed up in a recent report by a group of four leading NGOs active in the country:

> Afghan women face enormous challenges in assuming the new roles available to them—challenges that will not be overcome in a short time, but that require sustained attention and commitment. The cumulative effects of decades of war and years of egregious violations of women's rights have left a battered and dispersed community of women's activists and leaders. As a result, many Afghan women are severely traumatized, and even a dramatic improvement in conditions would not alleviate their ingrained fear and insecurity.
> [*Filling the Vacuum*, p. 40.]

This sound judgment yields a counsel not of despair, but of perseverance. A quick look back reveals how far Afghanistan's women have come in just the past six months, even as current conditions suggest how far they still have to go to regain their rightful place in their own society.

In sum, the U.S. effort outlined above has provided a very solid start. It has helped to establish a promising new institutional framework for Afghans in general, and for Afghan women in particular, to pursue better lives in peace; to deliver impressively swift initial advances in the nutrition, health, and educational status of women and children all over the country; and to repatriate and rehabilitate hundreds of thousands of formerly homeless and destitute Afghan refugees, many of whom had languished in foreign camps for years, or even decades. At the same time, it should be recognized that the job of reconstructing Afghanistan, and with it of reclaiming the destiny of its more than 15 million women and children, has only just begun.

While it is difficult to single out any one area for special scrutiny over this upcoming interlude, it is clear that the June Emergency Loya Jirga and its immediate political aftermath will set the tone for much of what follows inside Afghanistan. This historic meeting was charged with moving the country forward on the march toward representative government: first through the establishment of a Transitional Government and then, within a prescribed period of less than two years, through a new constitution, national election, and permanent political order.

The next Report to the Congress on U.S. Support for Afghan Women, Children, and Refugees will undoubtedly need to highlight this longer-term aspect of American involvement in Afghanistan's reconstruction, now that the most urgent needs of its most vulnerable citizens are beginning to be addressed.